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Anatomy of Hate. Putin and Ukraine

sample translation of several chapters

Putin's birthday

Putin was "born" on February 24, 2000, exactly 22 years before the start of Russia's great war against Ukraine.

Or rather, that day he said goodbye to his past.

In St. Petersburg, the former mayor of the city, Anatoly Sobchak, was buried. He died unexpectedly in a hotel in Kaliningrad. The death of Putin's 63-year-old former boss took with it many secrets. The most important of them is the story of his aide's ascent to the Olympus of power. This story has enough of everything - crime, communication with representatives of Piter's (colloquial Sankt-Petersburg) organized crime groups in the early 90s, and the first big fortune he earned.

On the day Putin paid his last respects to Sobchak, the FSB announced that they had busted a Chechen gang in St. Petersburg. The gang was allegedly preparing an assassination attempt on the new owner of the Kremlin. Whether this was true or not, no one knows for sure, and I think we will never know. Because the era of truth and half-truths in Yeltsin's Russia was replaced by

the era of Putin's lies. And in this era, it is unlikely that we will ever be able to find out what happened to the new leader of Russia in the city on the Neva on February 24, 2000.

Due to heightened security measures, Putin and his wife, Lyudmila, arrived early at the Tavrichesky Palace, where the coffin of the former mayor of Russia's northern capital was placed. With a mournful expression on his face, Vladimir delivered a speech. He spoke of Sobchak as a teacher who taught him to think freely and express himself openly.

“Anatoly Aleksandrovich Sobchak,” Putin said in a mournful voice, “was one of the brightest politicians in modern Russia. He was, of course, a politician of all-Russian scale. He was a politician who established the laws of morality in our society and state, promoted and affirmed democracy. He was one of the authors of the country's Basic Law. Through all his activities, he established the most important thing in the Constitution - for the first time in the history of our country, the Constitution was based on a person, a citizen with his freedoms and rights.”

As it turned out later, Putin said goodbye to his former boss along with the civil liberties and rights that Sobchak had so strongly defended. The new leader of Russia will put an end to them quite quickly. As well as democracy that was symbolized by the former mayor of St. Petersburg.

Some people say that Putin's eyes were wet at the funeral. Some people say that his face was cold. He talked for a long time with Sobchak's widow, Lyudmila Narusova, and with the ex-mayor's daughters, Ksenia and Maria. The Sobchaks knew Putin without the glitz and glamor of power. They

witnessed his stunning career rise. Power brought recognition, influence, and money to the family's friend. Putin was becoming a bloody dictator before their very eyes, ordering the burning of towns and villages and the execution of people in Chechnya. And on that cold February day, Putin was not just saying goodbye to Sobchak. Putin was saying "goodbye!" to his St. Petersburg past and to the suitcase he always carried behind the St. Petersburg mayor. I wonder what was in that suitcase?

Putin arrived in St. Petersburg as acting president of Russia. He was on his way to the highest office in the land. On December 31, 1999, President Yeltsin unexpectedly announced his resignation. Pronouncing the words with difficulty, he read from a prompter:

“I made a decision. I thought about it long and painfully. Today, on the last day of the last century, I am resigning.

I have heard many times: Yeltsin will hold on to power by any means necessary, he will not give it to anyone. This is a lie. It's not like that. I have always said that I would not bate an inch from the Constitution, that Duma elections should be held within the constitutional time frame. And it happened. I also wanted the presidential elections to be held on time, in June 2000. This was very important for Russia. We are creating a crucial precedent for a civilized voluntary transfer of power - power from the Russian president to another, newly elected president. And yet, I made another decision: I am leaving, leaving ahead of schedule.

I realized that I needed to do this. Russia has to enter the new millennium with new politicians, new faces, new smart, strong, energetic people. And we, those who have been in power for many years, have to go.”

The new smart, strong, and energetic person to whom Yeltsin was handing over power was Vladimir Putin.

Few people in 1999 knew that Russia had been ruled by a semi-conscious president for the past several years. Yeltsin often fainted during negotiations, spoke outright nonsense behind the political scenes, and was practically disabled. His inner circle realized that he might not make it to the next presidential election. He needed a replacement. They saw it in a relatively young KGB (Committee of State Security) officer with a nondescript appearance, no particular ambitions, always sober and focused. It seemed that there was no better candidate than Putin to play the role of executor. That's what the Yeltsin family thought. Russian oligarchs thought so too. Both were wrong. Kyiv also underestimated the new owner of the Kremlin.

But Putin, according to Ukraine's Foreign Minister (2007-2009) Volodymyr Ohryzko, quickly realized what is expected of him in Russia.

“Russia's new leader realized that the idea that was key in the Russian elite - that Ukraine should be strapped to his leg - had begun to weaken. Kuchma began to turn the state ship from a multi-vector foreign policy to a western direction. Moscow saw this. Putin realized that the format conceived by Yeltsin as a replacement for the USSR, the Commonwealth of Independent States, was not working, because Ukraine was showing again and again that it was not going to be just a backup dancer for Moscow within the framework of this CIS, within some economic and security superstate structures. We said it right away: The CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) is not for us, that all these economic unions are not for us. In other words, Putin

realistically assessed what was happening in Ukraine from his point of view and realized that he had to act differently.”

On March 26, 2000, Russia, as expected, elected Putin as president.

One of his first visits was to Sevastopol.

On April 18, Putin and Kuchma visited Crimea. They boarded the flagships (at the time) of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and the Ukrainian Navy - the Russian missile cruiser Moskva (yes, the same cruiser that Ukrainians sank in the Black Sea in 2022) and the Ukrainian frigate Hetman Sahaidachny.

Putin made it clear to Kuchma that he was at home in Crimea.

At the headquarters of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, the new Russian leader presented a Hero Star to Marine Commander Vladimir Karpushenko for his participation in the Chechen war (in 2014, during the annexation of Crimea, he participated in negotiations with Ukrainian sailors blockaded in Feodosia), and Fleet Commander Vladimir Komoyedov received the Order of Merit for the Fatherland, IV class. At the same time, Putin clearly answered journalists' questions about NATO's relations with Russia: “No, Russia is not welcome there. And if we are told that we are not welcome there, then we will object to NATO coming closer to our borders.”

It should be noted that at that time Putin was facing many internal challenges: there was a war in Chechnya, the corrupt Russian state apparatus was working in the interests of the oligarchs, and the press, which was in the hands of the latter, was mercilessly criticizing the central government. On top of all this,

Ukraine was demonstrating its independence by negotiating with NATO and European structures.

Volodymyr Ohryzko, who headed the foreign policy department in President Kuchma's administration in early 1996, recalls in a conversation with me how Kyiv was taking steps toward the West:

“We signed the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership with NATO in Madrid, we started to work actively to promote the ideas of Ukraine's integration into the European Union, we participated in many consultations both at the level of these organizations and at the bilateral level. I say “we” because, in fact, at least three people were very actively involved in these issues: Volodymyr Horbulin as Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council, Borys Tarasiuk, first as Deputy and then as the current Minister of Foreign Affairs, and me as the Head of the Foreign Policy Department of the Presidential Administration. “We helped President Kuchma to better understand the benefits that come first from cooperation with Western structures, and then from full membership as the ultimate goal. That is why I believe that this period, from 1996 to 1999, was crucial in terms of the fact that people started talking about us in Europe. Indeed, Moscow was in the forefront and tried to form an understanding among Western politicians that everything that was done in the former Soviet Union had to be done through Moscow, but we broke this strategy as best we could and where we could. As for multilateralism, Kuchma understood the post-Soviet mood in Ukraine, understood how great Russia's influence on the minds of our citizens, especially in the East and South, and also understood that we had to balance.”

Putin understood that Moscow was hopeless without keeping the Ukrainian state in its sphere of interest. Kyiv also realized this. However, just six months after Putin's inauguration, President Kuchma became accommodating in his negotiations with the Kremlin. After the unfolding of the “cassette scandal” and the accusations of murdering journalist Georgiy Gongadze, he will have no choice. The Ukrainian president was isolated. Putin was sure that under such conditions Ukraine was already in his pocket.

However, according to Ohryzko, all of Putin's plans went awry. Especially in 2004, when the Orange Revolution took place.

“He (Putin - editor's note) was humiliated twice and shown twice that Ukraine is not really Russia, and that there are people here who are the bearers of power, and that this power depends on the people. It was an absolute shock for him. He could not accept it and still cannot accept it. It was good for him that he was dealing with his slave people, not with the citizens of the country. Therefore, the choice for him was very simple: either I start to return Ukraine using methods that I understand, or I lose it. This train of thought led him to the only correct tactic from his point of view. And this is just the tip of the iceberg, it was much deeper behind the scenes,” Ohryzko tells me.

During the first ten years of Ukraine's independence, a whole caste of politicians and businessmen was formed in Ukraine, who were fed from the Kremlin's hand. Moscow was hooking entrepreneurs, party leaders, journalists, and others on the financial needle through lucrative contracts, subsidies, market opening, and investments in parliamentary and presidential election campaigns. The Kremlin was preparing to absorb Ukraine.

“A large part of the Ukrainian political elite was corrupted by the Russian Federation, its various structures, both the FSB and other special services, and the economic ones. In fact, it became powerful on this basis. This, unfortunately, was the practice that was introduced by Moscow in Ukraine. What did Moscow need? Moscow needed to strangle Ukraine economically. In other words, it was necessary to create such conditions that Ukrainian business would simply die, and Russian business would take its place,” says Ohryzko.

Putin, as a true KGB officer, was convinced that he would be able to take control of Ukraine.

But he was wrong. Because Ukraine is not just about corrupt political and business elites. Putin's dreams of appropriating and conquering Ukraine have been shattered. It happened in 2004 and 2014. It happened again in 2022.

Citizens with their own freedoms and rights, as dreamed of by the current Russian dictator's teacher, Anatoly Sobchak, turned out to be a reality, not an empty declaration. However, there is one significant nuance. These citizens do not live in Russia. They are citizens of a free and independent Ukraine.

Putin's honeymoon in Ukraine

1983

On a hot August day in 1983, Putin and his young wife, Lyudmila, went on a honeymoon trip.

At first, the newlyweds planned a cruise from Odesa to Yalta. But the bride was surprised when, right at the wedding, Vladimir gave the cruise tickets to his friend and his wife. “I’ll arrange a better cruise for you!” he whispered to Lyudmila.

The 31-year-old KGB officer led an ascetic life and was as poor as a church mouse. A modest salary, working day and night, food and clothing only through good connections. And he had no right to make a mistake in his work (in the KGB, this meant getting a ticket to leave). His only consolation was a ZAZ-968 car. As Putin himself recalled in his book “In the First Person”, his parents won this car in a lottery. According to the legend, Vladimir's mother was given a lottery ticket instead of small change in the work canteen, and it turned out to be the lucky one. At the time, Putin was in his third year of university. Although the family was struggling with financial problems, his parents decided to give the car to their son. In Soviet times, a car was not just a means of transportation, but a sign of wealth. Not everyone could afford even such a poor car as Zaporozhets. But Putin was proud of the car.

In Oleg Blotsky's book “Vladimir Putin. The Road to Power”, Lyudmila recalled how Vladimir took her for a ride in a ZAZ-968 around Leningrad at night. *“I remember there was a time when the car didn't have a muffler, and we were driving around Piter without it at half past two in the morning.*

Apparently, Vladimir Vladimirovich really wanted to show me the city at night, and, apparently, to “show me” his personal car, which was extremely prestigious at the time. So even back then, Vladimir Vladimirovich was the first-rate guy.”

In the early 1980s, Putin exchanged Zaporozhets, along with the garage, for a fourth-model Zhiguli. It was in this car that the newlyweds went on their honeymoon trip to Ukraine. Their friends, a married couple, traveled in another car.

Only a suicidal person could travel in a domestic car in the heat without air conditioning in the Soviet era. Or someone who wanted to show the whole world his exclusivity. “Look, fellow countrymen, a gentleman is coming! All the way from Leningrad! Thousands of kilometers away! He is his own master!” In reality, in Soviet times, the owner of the car was its slave. A master to others and a slave to a pile of scrap metal on wheels. No conveniences, a cramped interior, and no car service as such. But Putin kept up his wedding drive, traveling 1500 kilometers from Piter to Kyiv.

One can only imagine what Vladimir had to hear from Lyudmila. Instead of the sea breeze, her cruise was filled with gas stations, constant tightening of the nuts on the Zhiguli, and cities where the Putins stopped to rest.

The most interesting thing is that they both remember the trip differently. Lyudmila, for example, remembers Kyiv, where they went to the theater and stayed with Vladimir's friends, and Mykolaiv, where their car broke down. She also remembers Yalta, where the newlyweds vacationed for 12 days.

During his visit to Kyiv in 2004, Vladimir, already in the status of president, spoke in interviews with three Ukrainian TV channels about his honeymoon trip to Zakarpattia. Not a word about Kyiv. Not a single phrase about Mykolaiv, where he spent all night with his friends repairing his Zhiguli. Not a single hint of Yalta. There is only a mention of Vynohradiv and Berehove, where, as the Russian leader said, there are wonderful people with a Ukrainian language for which he has a special affection. To make Ukrainians believe in his sincerity, Putin even recited Shevchenko:

And the day goes on, and the night goes on.

And holding your head in your hands,

You wonder why

The Apostle of truth and science does not come.

At the same time, he admitted: “Unfortunately, I don't speak Ukrainian.” What else could Putin have said to journalists at the time? He wanted to be liked by the public. At the time, he was acting as a VIP campaigner on behalf of the candidate Viktor Yanukovych, whom Russia was pushing for the presidency.

During his 14 years in the Kremlin, from 2000 to 2014, Putin visited Ukraine 22 times. The last time the Russian leader flew to Kyiv was on July 27-28, 2013, to take part in the celebrations dedicated to the 1025th anniversary of the baptism of Kyivan Rus. This was followed by the Euromaidan, the Revolution of Dignity, the annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbas, and a large-scale offensive against Ukraine.

The story of the honeymoon is just a small episode in Putin's life. However, it is significant that all the film taken during the honeymoon, as Lyudmila recalls, was never developed or printed: *“Unfortunately, the photos have not survived. We had a camera and black and white film for it. I even took pictures of something, although I hardly knew how. Then these undeveloped films were lying around the house, and after a while we threw them away. So our honeymoon trip was left without photos”* (Oleg Blotsky, *“Vladimir Putin. The Road to Power”* (2002).

Apparently, the groom did not want anything to remind him of this trip. I do not exclude that in order to say goodbye to his bad memories, he also rushed to destroy Ukrainian cities where he probably felt depressed - Kyiv, Odesa, Mykolaiv. Is a person capable of giving orders to bomb the places with which he has the best memories of his youth, where he was truly in love? I am convinced that no.

Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, the former head of the Security Service of Ukraine (2006-2010 and 2014-2015), explains Putin's current rage and hate for Ukraine by the Ukrainophobia of the current Russian president. He says that it was hate for everything Ukrainian that pushed him to war.

“Putin's Ukrainophobia developed first as a personal trait, then as a philosophy, and finally as the state ideology of the Russian Federation. All those years he was in power. I think he was even a Ukrainophobe before he became president. Moreover, he sees the very existence of the Putin regime and Putin's Russia as a gradual or even simultaneous absorption of Ukraine”, Nalyvaichenko shared with me.

Now it is difficult to find those with whom Putin was friends in Ukraine in 1983. And it is a tedious task. The forty years that have passed have changed Putin, Ukraine, and those whom he considered his friends here. Since then, the master of the Kremlin has replaced his Zhiguli with an armored Mercedes, Lyudmila Putina with Alina Kabaeva, and Ukraine, to which he was once willing to travel 1,500 kilometers in his Soviet car, has long been a sovereign and independent state whose citizens continue to slap Putin in the face on the battlefield.

Ukraine and the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet Union

1985

“Brezhnev is dead! Brezhnev is dead!” a grieving Nina Ivanovna spread the terrible news through the school corridors.

The teacher wiped bitter tears from her face, smearing her simple makeup.

“What? What's going to happen now?” she cried out.

We looked at the teacher frightened. My neighbor at the desk whispered in my ear: “Now we will fight the Americans. Uncle Kolia says that we won't live long after Brezhnev's death.”

The 4-A sat stunned by the news of Brezhnev's death. Or rather, by the reaction of the adults to it. It seemed that on the morning of November 11, 1982, when the death of the General Secretary of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) was announced, life had stopped. The gloomy autumn sky, mournful music on television, and the fear of World War III had a depressing effect on us fourth-graders. So did the collective contemplation of the coffin with Brezhnev's body being lowered into the ground near the Kremlin wall.

The war with the Americans never began. Neither on the day of Brezhnev's death nor on the day of his burial on Red Square. And not even when Brezhnev was followed by his successors, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko. The latter two tried their best to follow the path of Illyich (Lenin), but followed the path of another Illyich (Brezhnev).

The Soviet Union was quietly dying, and with it those who had been its creators.

In March 1985, 54-year-old Mikhail Gorbachev came to power.

He was not like his predecessors, even though he had spent 30 years with them. He was talkative, with lively facial expressions, and a large birthmark on his head. Gorbachev dreamed of rebooting the state. The new leader of the USSR was well aware that life could not go on like this. At a plenum of the CPSU Central Committee in April 1985, Gorbachev outlined his vision of the future. Or rather, a plan for the country's renewal. The energetic Secretary General's proposals were summarized in three main theses: restructuring Soviet society, accelerating socio-economic development, and expanding glasnost (transparency) in the country. Gorbachev was convinced that he could save the Soviet Union from imminent collapse. However, the first attempt by the Secretary General to wean people off drinking failed. The anti-alcohol campaign he launched led to an increase in moonshine brewing in the USSR, massive vineyard cutting, and imitation of non-alcoholic parties where moonshine was poured from kettles.

Instead, glasnost and freedom of speech opened eyes to what was happening in the country. The truth about the Soviet army's involvement in the war in Afghanistan, stories about corruption at the highest state level, and stories about the country's tragic past seemed about to break through the floodgates of the dam called the Soviet Union.

When Gorbachev began to restructure the state, he failed to take into account one thing: there were not enough people in the country to lead this process.

In February 2004, sitting in his office in Moscow, I was with a group of Ukrainian journalists asking Gorbachev if there was any other way to get the USSR out of stagnation than the one he had chosen. The former Secretary General answered cautiously, weighing his words, with an easily recognizable tone. “We realized that the deterioration of the situation in the Soviet Union would inevitably lead to the collapse of the country. The Baltic republics would be the first to go, followed by the Caucasus, and then Ukraine. Without the latter, there would be no USSR. That's why we needed reforms that would prevent the country's collapse,” Gorbachev said.

At the time, the 72-year-old politician was still clear-headed. He boasted of his Ukrainian roots, complained about Boris Yeltsin, who had made him unable to leave Russia for many years, and complained about the collapse of the USSR. Ten years later, he would justify Putin's annexation of Crimea, for which the Security Service of Ukraine would declare him *persona non grata* in Ukraine.

At the time of the proclamation of perestroika (restructuring) in the USSR, only a small group of Ukrainians believed and dreamed of restoring their own state. Most of them were in Soviet camps in northern Russia or Siberia. The attempted Ukrainian revival in the early 60s was brutally suppressed in Ukraine until the early 70s. Vasyl Stus, Levko Lukianenko, Viacheslav Chornovil, Mykhailo and Bohdan Horyni, and many other leaders of the national liberation movement of the time were convicted of opposing the Soviet system. After serving their sentences, they returned to Ukraine, where

they were arrested again for anti-Soviet activities and propaganda and sent to Soviet concentration camps.

On September 4, 1985, when the so-called Perestroika was already underway in the Soviet Union, the poet and literary critic Vasyl Stus died in a punishment cell in the Soviet camp VS-389/36-1 in Kuchino, Perm Region. A year earlier, the writer Yuriy Lytvyn and the linguist Oleksa Tykhyi were tortured in that region. In a few years, this tortured trio would become a symbol of the struggle for Ukrainian independence. Less than four years later, 30,000 Ukrainians would take to the streets of Kyiv to rebury Stus, Tykhyi, and Lytvyn at the capital's Baikove Cemetery on November 19, 1989. The USSR was still in power. The KGB was still spying on the participants of that tragic march, including me, a third-year student at the journalism department of the Moscow State University. Gorbachev was still making resuscitation attempts to save the Soviet Union. But even then it was clear: Ukraine was headed for independence.

In 1985, there was no such feeling. Soviet Ukraine was watching the actions of the new General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. Gorbachev's liveliness did not produce quick results and was beginning to irritate Ukrainians. It didn't take long for admiration to turn to hate. Life in the USSR was not improving. It was getting worse. Soap, laundry detergent, sugar, and even matches gradually began to disappear from store shelves along with the shortage of alcohol.

In 1985, Vladimir Putin entered the Andropov Red Banner Institute of the KGB. The office still hoped to keep the Soviet Union under its control. And not only the Union, but also the countries of Eastern Europe, which were

under the watchful eye of the USSR. The year Perestroika was announced, Putin was sent to Germany, where he worked until 1990. Upon returning home, as he later admitted, he worked as a taxi driver to support his family. *“I lived like everyone else, but sometimes I had to earn extra money as a taxi driver, driving a car, private taxiing. It's unpleasant to talk about it, to be honest, but unfortunately, it was true,”* he admitted.

Therefore, it is clear why Putin perceived the collapse of the Soviet Union as a tragedy and the collapse of “historical Russia.”

“Finally, what is the collapse of the Soviet Union? It is the collapse of historical Russia called the Soviet Union... We have become a different country completely. And everything that has been developed over a thousand years has been largely lost,” the Kremlin's master said in the documentary “Modern History”, which premiered in 2021. Putin claims that Russia has lost 40% of its territory, production facilities, and population. The Russian president does not specify what these territories are, but it can be assumed that he considers Ukrainian lands to be Russian.

At the end of the 1980s, the Soviet political car, covered with stickers of “Glasnost” and “Perestroika”, was rushing into the abyss. Ukrainians realized this just a year later, in 1986. The explosion of the fourth reactor of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant on the night of April 26, or rather, the way the events surrounding the largest man-made disaster in Europe in the twentieth century unfolded, demonstrated the weakness of the Soviet government, both in Moscow and Kyiv. Despite Gorbachev's declaration of glasnost, Ukrainians faced a silence about the scale of the nuclear disaster that occurred 110 kilometers north of the Ukrainian capital. "The Voice of America and Radio

Liberty were screaming about the tragedy at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. According to various estimates, radiation equivalent to 300 to 500 bombs dropped on Hiroshima was released into the atmosphere. 50,000 square kilometers of Ukrainian land, the size of an average Eastern European country, were contaminated. As early as April 30, radiation levels in Kyiv rose to 1700 micro-roentgens per hour, when the norm was less than 20 micro-roentgens. Two days later, this figure reached 2500 micro roentgens per hour.

The Kremlin, however, decided not to create panic. On May 1, 1986, on Moscow's orders, schoolchildren and workers were brought to the traditional May Day procession on Khreshchatyk. Thousands of Kyiv children, including the children and grandchildren of the leaders of Soviet Ukraine, joyfully greeted Volodymyr Shcherbytsky, the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, and eight members of the Politburo on the tribune located on October Revolution Square.

The former head of the Kyiv City Executive Committee, Valentyn Zgursky, later recalled how Shcherbytsky swore fiercely at Mikhail Gorbachev that day. *“I told him that the parade should not be held on Khreshchatyk. It's not Red Square, it's a valley - radiation is concentrated here! But he answered me: “Just try not to hold the parade! I'll kill you”*, Zgursky recalled Shcherbytsky's words.

The festive columns moved down Khreshchatyk, providing a television picture for the Soviet leadership. Demonstrators, holding portraits of Gorbachev and other members of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee, shouted Soviet slogans and pretended that nothing special was

happening. However, at that very time, the military, police, and firefighters were evacuating hundreds of thousands of people from the 30-kilometer zone around the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. Lines of hundreds of buses and cars moved toward Kyiv. The towns of Prypiat and Chernobyl and dozens of surrounding villages, having taken the lion's share of the radiation, were deserted.

The explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and the concealment of the truth about the consequences of the accident put an end to the Ukrainians' illusions about the “perestroika” of the USSR. It was obvious that in the conditions of the renewed Soviet Union, the people of Ukraine, along with their Communist Party leadership, would continue to play the role of nuts and bolts in a large imperial machine. No more. This understanding led to the formation of a purely Ukrainian national democratic movement. One of its important parts was the Green World Environmental Association (in 1990, the Green Party was formed on its basis), which demanded the closure of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and increased attention to those affected by the Chernobyl disaster. The first crowded rallies in Kyiv were held under environmental slogans, which later transformed into demands to restore Ukrainian independence, return to the native language, and ban the Communist Party and Komsomol.

At the same time, in Kyiv and Lviv, conscious Ukrainians were uniting around the Ukrainian Cultural Club, the Taras Shevchenko Ukrainian Language Society, the Ukrainian Helsinki Union, the Memorial organization, and dozens, perhaps hundreds of other groups. They were joined by dissidents who paid with their own freedom for the right to speak and be heard.

Would this have been possible without Gorbachev and Perestroika? Of course, yes. However, it was the last General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee (and the first and only president of the USSR) who managed to give an extraordinary acceleration to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Without the breaths of freedom and glasnost that we received in 1985, I am sure that the path to restoring Ukrainian independence would have been much longer and bloodier. Despite the fact that Gorbachev remained an imperialist until the end of his life, in both 1990 and 1991 he did not resort to the use of force to keep the Soviet republics together. Attempts to modify the Union, to propose a different format of coexistence within the renewed USSR, failed.

A new era was beginning - the era of independent Ukraine.

Three Maidans and a great war with Russia were ahead.

The poisoning of Yushchenko. Dioxin from the FSB

2004

On October 15, 1959, at lunchtime, Stepan Bandera was walking along Kreittmayrstraße in Munich. To his neighbors, his name was Stefan Popel. And just the few knew that the 50-year-old man was the leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, whom the KGB hunted. He was one of the visionary leaders of the struggle for Ukrainian independence in the twentieth century and a symbol of the national liberation movement. On June 30, 1941, together with another OUN leader, Yaroslav Stetsko, he proclaimed an independent Ukrainian state in Lviv.

Stepan entered building 7. Having climbed up a few steps, he saw a man pointing a newspaper towards him. Shot. Stepan fell onto the stairs. The man vanished just as quickly as he appeared. Frau Hamse, the neighbor, heard the noise and rushed out of her apartment. In a moment, Yaroslava, Stepan's wife, was here. The man was still alive. The responding ambulance had no chance to take the patient to the hospital. He died. Doctors suggested that he had a heart attack. However, an autopsy four days later showed that Bandera was poisoned with cyanide. Three years later, after a KGB agent Bohdan Stashynskyi fled to the West, it came to light that the OUN leader was killed by Soviet security services. It was also found out that in 1957, Stashynskyi similarly used a spray gun filled with potassium cyanide to kill another leader of Ukrainian nationalists, Lev Rebet.

In September 2004, 45 years after Bandera's assassination, Russia used poison to attack Ukrainian presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko.

At that time, the world had not yet spoken up about the use of toxic substances by Russian intelligence services abroad.

Alexander Litvinenko hadn't been assassinated yet and the poisoning of the Skripals hadn't been attempted yet.

Unlike in the case of Bandera and Rebet, no special gun was used to shoot at Yushchenko. Everything was much more exquisite. According to Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, the former head of the Security Service of Ukraine, a professional chemist with access to toxic substances and ties with representatives of the Russian government, was introduced into Yushchenko's entourage under the guise of a cook. It was he, according to the former head of the Security Service of Ukraine, who poisoned the then-leader of the presidential race with dioxin.

“Together with our international partners, we even carried out an analysis and identified the Russian FSB unit that the dioxin used against presidential candidate Yushchenko could have come from,” Nalyvaichenko indicates to me.

Let us, however, look at the poisoning of Yushchenko in its due order.

The leaders of the 2004 presidential campaign were two Viktor: Yushchenko and Yanukovich. The first one was a former prime minister, a national democratic nominee. The second one was the current head of government, a favorite of the residents of the South and East of Ukraine. Yushchenko was a pro-Western politician, and Yanukovich was a pro-Russian one.

Putin was quite explicit about his preference for the latter. This hardly could

be referred to as sympathy, though. The Kremlin put its stake on Yanukovich, to be more precise. He had been convicted twice, grew up in the Donbas, and, in all likelihood, had long been hooked by the intelligence services – since the USSR times – because otherwise he hardly would have made such a stunning career in Ukrainian politics. In 2004, the entire Russian propaganda machine and Moscow political strategists worked for Yanukovich.

However, despite all the efforts of the Kremlin, in September 2004, sociology data were inexorable: if Yanukovich made it through to the second round, he would lose to Yushchenko by seven percent. The ambitious Putin could not allow this. He had been setting up a system in which Ukraine had to fall under the complete control of Russia without firing a shot. A former KGB officer, he was definitely annoyed about being forced to deal with the maladroit and narrow-minded Viktor Yanukovich. On the same ground, he was angry for being forced to give a helping hand to Kuchma to pull him through after the murder of journalist Gongadze. Russia actively subsidized Ukrainian politicians and businessmen for a single purpose: control over Ukraine.

Putin's plans didn't include V. Yushchenko. Viktor's second wife was a US citizen. He himself regarded Bandera as a hero, and the national democrats – as the basis for the development of Ukraine.

How and when had the Kremlin hatched a plan to poison Yushchenko – we are unlikely to ever find out, I believe. Moreover, some Ukrainians may remain convinced for life that Yushchenko was not poisoned but that he ate something bad. After all, one of Yushchenko's people, the late Davyd Zhvaniia, had been speaking publicly about this for many years. I interviewed him in 2008. I remember well him then, virtually for the first time,

questioning the fact of the poisoning of Yushchenko. “Pancreatitis,” he said then. In response to my clarifying question about how dioxin then appeared in the blood of the third President of Ukraine, he just shrugged his shoulders.

Davyd Zhvaniia was a key witness in the case of the poisoning of Yushchenko. On September 5, 2004, the final day of Viktor’s active pre-election meetings with Ukrainians and the late evening when he visited the dacha of First Deputy Chairman of the Security Service of Ukraine Valeriy Satsiuk to meet with the leadership of the Security Service of Ukraine, Davyd was with him. And it seems that he knew more than he told me or the investigators. Yushchenko was and still is confident that he was poisoned at Satsiuk’s dinner.

On the morning of September 6, Yushchenko felt unwell. Nausea, terrible headache, and severe stomach pain. He needed help but Ukrainian doctors weren’t able to discern the reason for the sudden illness of one of the leaders of the presidential race. Yushchenko was forced out of the pre-election tour. Three days later, he was taken to the Rudolfinerhaus Hospital in Austria. He was diagnosed with acute pancreatitis as a complication of toxin poisoning. On September 11, the head of the hospital, Michael Zimpfer, said that Yushchenko was poisoned with dioxin and his colleague Mykola Korpan emphasized that if the patient had arrived at the Rudolfinerhaus a little later, the risk of death would have reached 80%.

In the Vienna hospital, Yushchenko showed signs of facial paralysis. His charming face became pockmarked. Dioxin diseased this handsome man. Those who were around Yushchenko at that time say that he was getting tired very quickly and was often breaking into a sweat. The doctors insisted that a

24-hour guard be posted at Victor's ward in the Rudolfinerhaus.

This is the context in which the election campaign took place in Ukraine. Yanukovych's supporters held that the poisoning story was one of the ways for the opposing team to win a landslide victory in the race. Yushchenko himself, speaking at the end of September from the podium in the Verkhovna Rada with his pockmarked face, accused the then-government led by Kuchma and Yanukovych of poisoning. The Parliament initiated the creation of a provisional investigatory commission headed by Volodymyr Sivkovych, who once served in the USSR foreign intelligence service.

The Prosecutor General's Office would first open and then close a criminal case into the poisoning of a presidential candidate. It then would reopen the case, investigate, investigate more, and investigate it again, blaming the victim for not providing new blood samples to the investigators. Witnesses were reluctant to give a statement. The Sivkovych commission concluded that there was no evidence of deliberate poisoning of Yushchenko.

In 2005, when Viktor Yushchenko assumed the presidency, the case was reinstated. The victim himself even turned to Putin with a request to facilitate the investigation. *"I approached Vladimir Putin in 2005, asking for cooperation between the Russian and Ukrainian prosecutors. For example, on the exchange of dioxin products produced in Russian laboratories, so that Ukraine receives formulas for the material obtained from other international centers. The perpetrators of this crime were not extradited to Ukraine. Russia took no positive step to facilitate the investigation,"* Yushchenko recalls.

Nalyvaichenko, the current head of the Security Service of Ukraine who investigated the case of the poisoning of Yushchenko, says that the evidence

base was assembled in 2007-2008. There was only one thing left: the victim had to set the matter in motion. But he never did it.

“We uncovered a massive amount of information that was previously unknown for some reason,” says Nalyvaichenko. *“I had even been to Tbilisi to visit Georgian President Saakashvili: he brought in all the potential of his intelligence services and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and they helped us a lot. I collected all this information and reported to President Yushchenko: Here is what we found out, here is what we closed in on, and here is a proposal to submit all this evidence to the court. There was no decision from Viktor Yushchenko as a victim, he did not use these materials and did not apply to the court. This was his personal standing, I suppose. However, by that time, in 2007-2008, the version with the poisoning of the presidential candidate had already had an evidentiary basis. As evidence of this version, it was found that the then-first deputy chairman of the Security Service of Ukraine, Satsiuk, fled to Russia and has been hiding there ever since; moreover, he works in a military company concerned either with insurance or some other Russian war crimes. In its entirety, however, and based on the work done, including with international partners, this was a thorough investigation with a solid evidentiary basis.”*

The lack of a court verdict in the case of the poisoning of Yushchenko has allowed Putin to continue to portray himself as an honest and decent person. The unfinished case with dioxin poisoning resulted in tragic consequences, both in Ukraine and abroad.

Unpunished evil returned to Ukraine with a large-scale war, and to the world – with the poisoning of Litvinenko, the Skripals, the mysterious death of

Berezovsky, and the poisoning and destruction of Navalny. And what is more, it continued the existence of a pro-Russian pool of politicians in Ukraine.

To round out the picture, we should mention the fate of those who were involved in the case of the poisoning of Yushchenko.

Volodymyr Satsiuk, the former deputy head of the Security Service of Ukraine, at whose dacha Yushchenko was probably poisoned, fled to Russia. Became an FSB general.

Davyd Zhvaniia, a former friend of Yushchenko, joined President Yanukovych's team in 2012. On May 9, 2022, he was killed in artillery fire at a checkpoint of the Russian occupiers in the vicinity of the village of Novopokrovka in the Zaporizhzhia oblast. It was also established that he had Russian citizenship and was an unofficial representative of Rosatom in Ukraine.

Volodymyr Sivkovych, ex-head of the provisional investigatory commission of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, which investigated the circumstances of the poisoning of Yushchenko. The prime suspect in the Euromaidan dispersal on November 30, 2014. Fled to Russia. Accused of treason. He is one of the leaders of the anti-Ukrainian movement created by the Russian intelligence services.

Viktor Yanukovych, ex-president of Ukraine, Yushchenko's main competitor in the 2004 presidential elections. In 2014, he fled to Russia.

Sviatoslav Piskun, former Prosecutor General of Ukraine, investigated the case of the poisoning of Yushchenko. Became an ally of Yanukovich. He was twice elected to the Parliament on the Party of Regions («Партія регіонів») list.

Yanukovych hand-feeding Putin and Medvedev

2004

On October 28, 2004, on the Maidan Nezalezhnosti square in the center of Kyiv, there stood President Kuchma, Prime Minister Yanukovych, Russian President Putin, the head of the Russian Presidential Administration Medvedev, and the head of the office of the President of Ukraine Medvedchuk. They reviewed a parade for the anniversary of the liberation of Ukraine from the German Nazis.

In the crosshairs of the cameras, all of a sudden, Yanukovych put his hand inside his respectable coat and scooped out a handful of candy. He sent one into his mouth.

“Dmitry Anatolyevich, help yourself,” Yanukovych offered a candy to Medvedev.

He took several, put them into his mouth, and nodded his head contentedly in gratitude.

“Vladimir Vladimirovich,” Yanukovych turned to Putin. He thrust out a candy. Putin fastidiously curled his lips and refused.

Kuchma was not offered a candy. He stood there, angry, feeling vicarious shame for Yanukovych. For the one whom he chose as his successor. After all, it was for his sake that this event was organized in the center of the Ukrainian capital, for which, by the way, the victory banner that was raised over the Reichstag in May 1945, was brought specially from Moscow.

Yanukovych, next to Putin and Medvedev, should have made an appealing TV picture before the second round of the presidential elections, scheduled for November 21. Candy for Moscow guests did not fit into this composition. Nevertheless, Yanukovych neglected this, for he felt certain: victory was locked and loaded in his pocket – somewhere there, next to the candy. And he wasn't wrong. On November 24, the Central Election Commission declared him the winner of the presidential election. Putin and Lukashenko were the only foreign leaders to congratulate Yanukovych on his victory. The opposition, along with hundreds of thousands of people who came to the center of Kyiv, demanded a repeat second round, accusing the winning team of rigging the elections.

Putin was furious. In a matter of days, the public turned him and Yanukovych into a laughing stock. Yanukovych's then-wife, Liudmyla, also had her hand in it, saying publicly that on Maidan, Yushchenko's supporters were doled out felt boots and "drugged-up oranges".

It should be mentioned that since 2002, Moscow has put in great efforts to make Yanukovych Kuchma's successor. Their "client" had two criminal records, the turbulent 90s in the Donbas, friendship with crime figures of the East of Ukraine, and a highly developed greed for money. Putin, with his KGB experience, understood that with such a background, Yanukovych was a perfect presidential candidate for Ukraine. He was easy to manipulate, blackmail, or bribe.

Only a few know whether Yanukovych was recruited by the KGB during his time in prison. But the speed with which the twice-convicted man moved up

the career ladder suggests that the intelligence services clearly had a hand in this.

To my question about whether the USSR Committee for State Security could have kept Yanukovych on track since his young age, the former head of the Security Service of Ukraine Valentyn Nalyvaichenko answered in the affirmative:

“Of course. Since his first leadership position at a transport enterprise in the Donetsk region, followed by his appointment as either a chairman or a first deputy chairman of the Oblast Administration, I believe. My sense is that from then on, the Russian intelligence services could have been keeping him on track. One should understand, however, that Yanukovych is way more than a KGB agent, way more serious. And way more dangerous. He is the influence. One of the agents of influence. He was Putin’s ace in the hole.”

It is revealing that twice – both in 2002 and in 2004, – when President Kuchma was deciding on candidates for prime minister and president, respectively, his personnel deck was strong and diverse. The candidates at that time included competent administrators, bankers and truly promising politicians. Despite this fact, both times did Kuchma settle upon Yanukovych. Upon a person whom he, I’m sure, didn’t even like. In 2004, when the then-president announced Yanukovych as his successor, Kuchma is said even to publicly apologize to Serhii Tihipko, who wanted to run for president: “Sorry, Seriozha, not this time!” This way or another – it doesn’t really matter. Obviously, someone was constantly pushing Yanukovych forward, and the latter was drawing all the “Donetsk people” into power and business. If this “someone” was not Kuchma, then, no surprise, this “someone” was in

Moscow.

Putin, having received the twice-convicted Yanukovych for “indoctrination”, understood that such a character was the easiest way to suppress Ukraine. However, the three years spent by the Kremlin to put its nominee in the presidential chair were in vain. Slow-witted, poorly educated, with a criminal record – candidate Yanukovych lost the 2004 elections. In his first questionnaire as a presidential candidate, Yanukovych made 12 mistakes in 90 words, including the word “professor”, having spelled it as “proffesser”.

Putin, having made immense efforts to get Yanukovych to win, was upset at the defeat of his indoctrinee. His sadness, surely, was partially dispelled in 2006, when Viktor Fedorovych, albeit briefly, sat in the chair of a Prime Minister.

When the 2010 presidential elections in Ukraine approached, the Kremlin was prepared more carefully for it. Moscow was playing with both main candidates: Tymoshenko and Yanukovych. The first one flew to Moscow to buy gas from then-prime minister Putin. The second, backed by Russia, was growing his political muscles for revenge. The very same Putin admitted publicly that he was ready to work with anyone in Kyiv but with Yushchenko, for he led Ukraine into NATO and the EU.

In the second round of the 2010 presidential elections held in February, Yanukovych, having beaten Tymoshenko by 3.5% of the votes, became the President of Ukraine.

After Yanukovych came to power, the so-called Kharkiv Pact with Russia was concluded. Representatives of the FSB were introduced to the Security Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Defense, and the Foreign Intelligence Service to control everything and everyone.

According to Nalyvaichenko, Moscow, through Yanukovych, managed at that time to take control of all the processes taking place in Ukraine.

Yanukovych's team, composed of "Donbas people", had been moving in on businesses, media resources, and political actors and absorbing funds from the state budget. The President's allies came to be called "the Yanukovych Family". It included the President's people who held key positions in the government, the state-owned companies, and the Parliament. According to a former adviser to the government of Ukraine, Anders Aslund, the Yanukovych Family's fortune in 2014 was \$12 billion.

It is reported that during his last birthday celebration as a President on July 9, 2013, in the presence of Ukrainian oligarchs, Yanukovych made a toast. It centered around the following: "In due course, these guys (the birthday boy nodded towards the young members of the "Family", among whom there were two of Yanukovych's sons – Oleksandr and Viktor, Serhii Arbutov, etc.) will lead Ukraine instead of us." Rinat Akhmetov and his people didn't really like what was said.

On November 29, 2013, the signing of the Agreement on Association and Free Trade Area with the European Union was planned in Vilnius. Just a week before, the Ukrainian government abandoned European integration. A month before that, a secret meeting between Yanukovych and Putin took place in

Sochi, where the latter convinced the Ukrainian President to join the Customs Union in the CIS, in opposition to the European Union.

It was in Sochi, as Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, the former head of the Security Service of Ukraine, suggests, that Yanukovich was shown Russia's plans to create Novorossiia in the East and South of Ukraine.

“Yanukovich really disappeared for several days and locked himself up with Putin in Sochi. From my experience and expertise, I assume that Yanukovich was then shown everything in detail and he was pinned down with the Novorossiia plan. Everything that began in 2014, was, in general terms and fundamental details, shown to him then. And he was just told: “Go ahead and do it!” I think that he didn't resist that much and agreed immediately to do anything he was expected to. And here is the evidence. What was the first thing Yanukovich did when he fled at the beginning of 2014 when the Revolution of Dignity was already winning? He went to Kharkiv and was talking there about Novorossiia, even calling for the distribution of weapons. That is, he exposed all Putin's plans then,” Nalyvaichenko believes.

Yanukovich's abandonment of European integration led first to the Euromaidan, and then to the Revolution of Dignity. The discontent of the Ukrainian people, against whom the then-government sent armed special forces, led to the crash of the Yanukovich regime.

Since 2014, he has served the purpose of a jackstraw in Putin's hands. Time and again, he is taken out of a box, shaved, dressed in a suit, and shown to the public stating that he was and remains the legitimate president of Ukraine. The last time the Kremlin made such an attempt was in 2022 when Russian

troops entered Kyiv from Belarus. Yanukovych was then planned to be forcibly returned to the presidency of Ukraine. But it never worked out.

Twenty years after 2004, the candy has long melted in Yanukovych's pocket. Putin never tasted it. Today, he has only one thing left to do – swallow the bitter pills of his defeat in Ukraine. In the very Ukraine which Putin was never able to subjugate.

PTN PNH! Putin as a meme in Ukraine

2014

On the afternoon of March 30, 2014, a crowd of thousands of football fans moved through the center of Kharkiv to the beat of drums.

Armed with blue and yellow flags, flares, and a banner with the inscription in Russian: “United Country”, fans of the Kharkiv “Metalist” and Donetsk “Shakhtar” shouted at the top of their lungs: “Putin huilo (Putin is a dickhead)! La-la-la-la!” It was a remake of the chant of Kharkiv fans about the former president of the Football Federation of Ukraine Hryhorii Surkis.

Drum beats set the rhythm. The ultras kept repeating the last name of the Russian President. With each next repetition, the fan chant became increasingly more reminiscent of a mantra, or rather, a Maha-mantra (do you remember: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Hare Hare?). Unlike the latter, however, the chanting “Putin huilo” was rather an engraving of the Russian President’s name in modern history.

Having taken to the streets in support of Ukrainian sovereignty, football fans of the two clubs did what no political strategist could do: they desacralized Putin in Ukraine. The very same Putin, whom 59% of Ukrainians trusted during 2000-2014. Not every domestic politician won such country-wide decisive support in Ukraine. Russian television propaganda, which had been molding Putin into a good “tsar” for fourteen years, right up to the annexation of Crimea, made the Ukrainians believe in the power of the Kremlin’s master. And now, this power and omnipotence was shattered by the football chant “Putin huilo!”, which became popular just within a few months. It was

chanted in stadiums on all continents, it could be heard at political rallies and protests, it was written on the walls of buildings and Russian embassies around the globe, everyone from a child to an old man in Ukraine sang it, it became a symbol of the struggle of Ukrainians against Putin. It was also chanted in Russia itself: on July 6, 2014, nine people were detained on Manezhnaya Square for singing the chant.

A few months later, the phrase “Putin huilo!” was voiced by the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Andrii Deshchytsia. On June 14, 2014, he and the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Arsen Avakov arrived at the Russian embassy on Povitroflotskyi Avenue in Kyiv. Ukrainians gathered there to express their outrage over the fact that pro-Russian terrorists shot down an IL-76 plane in Luhansk. There were 40 paratroopers and 9 crew members on board who, unfortunately, died.

When the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs arrived at the Russian embassy, Molotov cocktails were being thrown at the building, six vehicles of Putin diplomats were overturned and one was on fire. The Russian flag on the flagpole was replaced by the blue and yellow flag of Ukraine. Windows in the embassy building were smashed. The protesters had no plans to stop there. Chanting “Putin huilo!”, the crowd was ready to burn not only the vehicles but also the building itself, in which the personnel of the Russian diplomatic corps hid. The situation was about to rage out of control. The chief Ukrainian diplomat had only one chance to prevent the burning of the Russian embassy: to stand next to the protesters and stop them. So Deshchytsia seized this chance. In response to the question “Who is Putin?” he said: “Huilo!” Next, the crowd was repeating rhythmically: “Putin huilo!”

The story of the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs near the Russian Embassy in Kyiv, apparently, was mentioned in all diplomatic dispatches from Ukraine that day, making not only Andrii Deshchytsia world famous but also the very chant “Putin huilo!” President Putin was also reported about the incident. However, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov responded instead of him. The latter stated that the Ukrainian minister “insulted the entire Russian people, the entire great Russia.”

“He (Deshchytsia – S.R.) was not dismissed for this. The incident indicates that the people who came to power in Kyiv have no understanding of politics, diplomacy, ethics, or the principles of mutual respect between politicians of different countries recognized by the world community. Ukrainian officials have no idea what state-building, democracy, and cooperation are. Even officials of warring countries wouldn’t allow themselves to make such obscene statements,” Kadyrov posted on his Instagram on June 16, 2014. He also added that as the Minister did not think of dropping on his knees, he would be advised to in an easily-accessible form.

Naturally, Deshchytsia did not kneel. Instead, they learned in Russia from Kadyrov what Ukrainians call Vladimir Putin.

The phrase “Putin huilo!” has become the most famous meme in the world. The chant was performed at the qualifying matches of the 2016 European Football Championship, the Champions League, and the Europe League. Next, it was chanted by fans of the Lithuanian basketball club Žalgiris, followed by rugby and boxing fans. Personalized license plates with inscriptions derived from the fan chant were installed on Ukrainian vehicles:

«ПІТН ПІНХ», «ПІТН ХІО», «ПІТН ПІНХ ХІО» etc. So that the expression doesn't have an obscene connotation, it was rendered as "Putin Hello!", "Hutin Puilo", "Hutin Pui", "Putler Huilo", or "Putin is a h*i".

In the TV show "Servant of the People", where Volodymyr Zelensky played the leading role, his character, the newly elected President Holoborodko, comes to choose an expensive watch and a suit, which should correspond to his status. According to the plot, the assistant says: Putin wears a watch by the Swiss brand Hublot (pronouncing it as "Hublo"). Zelensky's character is surprised: "Is Putin Hublo?" In December 2019, when the show was broadcast on the Russian TNT channel, this fragment was cut out. Don't even ask me why. Two months after this, journalist Andrei Vandenko asked Putin if he had seen the fragment of "Servant of the People" where Zelensky's character chooses a watch. He replied that he had not seen the show. "I have no idea who Holoborodko is or whom and what are they electing there," answered the Russian President.

Desacralized by football fans, Putin was seen by the majority of Ukrainians as a petty, evil, weak-hearted person. I am sure this irritated the apprentice of St. Petersburg's backstreet. He was preparing to take revenge on the Ukrainians. Viciously, despicably, and so that the next generations of Ukrainians remember once and for all how the bullying and mockery of the Moscow "tsar" ends. On February 24, 2022, Putin launched a large-scale invasion of Ukraine, shelling also Kharkiv. A city where some of the residents speak Russian, the Russians themselves speak of it as "their own". A city whose football fans, like other Ukrainian ultras of 2014, took up arms and went to fight the Russians. Among them is Serhii Velychko, who is considered to be

the author of the chant “Putin huilo!” As of March 2023, 160 Ukrainian football fans have been killed in the war with Russia.

I have never been a conspiracy theorist and would rather not contrive causes of any events. But I’m more than certain: the massive attacks on Kharkiv, starting from February 2022, have to do with Putin’s banal desire to take revenge on both the city and Kharkiv residents for the shame he felt when “Putin huilo” was rolling around the globe. I see no other reason to mercilessly destroy the city, which Russia wanted to make the capital of the South-East Ukrainian Autonomous Republic led by Viktor Yanukovych ten years ago.

Ukraine has chanted and continues to chant “Putin huilo!” And no amount of shelling, killing, and destruction will silence the Ukrainians. The more Russia attacks Ukraine, the louder this chant sounds. In the winter of 2022, when the Russian occupiers attacked Kyiv’s energy system and deprived the residents of the Ukrainian capital of light and heat, Kyiv residents leaned out of their windows and chanted in unison: “Putin huilo!”

Over the past ten years, it has transformed from a statement chant into a battle cry capable of uniting Ukrainians in the face of the Russian invasion. This is how things stand today and will hopefully stand in the future. Putin, who so badly wanted to get his name inked in history, achieved his goal. In Ukraine, at least. Here, he will always be remembered as a “huilo”.